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Rudolf Polanszky
Koma, Night and Sleep
Drawing, 1983, paint, ink, crayon
 on paper, 252 x 181 cm. Courtesy
 Ancient & Modern, London



Elizabeth Price
Choir (Part 3), 2011, production
 still. Courtesy the artist and MOT
 International, London & Brussels

CHIANDETTI & POLANSZKY

Marco Chiandetti & Rudolf Polanszky
Ancient & Modern, London
22 March – 28 April

'There are far fewer gestures in the world than there are individuals,' says Milan Kundera in *Immortality* (1990), and it follows that there are far fewer gestures in the history of art than there are artists. Gesture in art – the bodily engagement with physical matter, let's say – is drawn from a narrowing repertoire of strategies, like a gradually refined recipe. Yet we remain bodies in space, and the unique ability of objects to be metonymic of their makers allows them to remain emotive markers of somatic absence. Those very limitations, in fact, enable works of art to collapse historical distance through the re-treading of known roads.

Ancient & Modern's series of dialogues between artists of divergent generations continues in their show of Marco Chiandetti (b. 1973) and Rudolf Polanszky (b. 1951), both of whom address Bruce Nauman's legacy of the body caught in traces and objects. Take Chiandetti's six bright aluminium casts (all *Untitled*, 2012) of pliable matter, thumped and stretched into small tsunamis. Like saintly relics, each acts as a witness to physical actuality, their gouged surfaces calling up the heels of spectral hands, the dents of distant knuckles. In Chiandetti's charcoal works on paper (all *Untitled*, 2012), explosions of dark matter, like mushroom clouds in negative, give testament to a body in heightened stress. Made by hurling material against a surface, Chiandetti's works recast the studio as boxing ring: violence recollected in tranquillity.

Where Chiandetti's works figure the creative body as taut and assertive, channelling Richard Serra's tough-guy late-1960s performances, Polanszky's 1983 *Koma, Night and Sleep Drawing* engages with an alternative tradition of markmaking: the automatic. In a kind of slacker retread of Carolee Schneemann's *Up To and Including Her Limits* (1973–6), the artist attached paint-dipped brushes and crayons to his body and tried to fall asleep on a paper surface. Made over four sessions of extended semina-

pping, the resulting work (also a Super-8 film, called *Koma*, 1983) is a storm of swabbed, swiped and dragged colours. Like Robert Rauschenberg's *Bed* (1955), Polanszky's roiled surface implies an erotic release of fluids as well as the unwilling motion of the dreaming mind. And yet Polanszky's colour scheme, each pegged to a different body part during different bouts of sleeping, suggests an attempt, if quixotic, to make sense of the body's erratic motion. As in his earlier film *Zu einer Semiologie der Sinner* (1976) – in which the artist films his own descent into drunkenness, hand-colouring the film reel according to the gestures (smoking, drinking, vomiting) he makes – there's a theme of the mind making sense of the body. In both artists' works, matter becomes a receptacle for a diagnostic analysis of the body's oddness. And in their awkwardness – the heavy chunks of metal, the light skein of charcoal dust, the clods of paint on frayed surface – they enact bodily metaphors that retain currency as long as minds remain incarnate.

BEN STREET

ELIZABETH PRICE

Elizabeth Price: *Here*
Baltic, Gateshead
3 February – 27 May

Do we live in a world drowning in objects? Are we manipulated and seduced by our possessions? Deyan Sudjic, writing of his complicity as a consumer of goods with built-in obsolescence, concludes: 'They are our toys: consolations for the unremitting pressures of acquiring the means to buy them and which infantilise us in our pursuit of them.' Elizabeth Price's videoworks *User Group Disco* (2009) and *West Hinder* (2012) bring us into a similar encounter with 'the language of things', though they do far more than offer up another cautionary tale of 'the accursed share' or our seduction by design. More than anything, the interplay in Price's work is between who, or what, has greater agency, 'us' or 'them'. Like the Surrealists, her interest in objects is complex and ambivalent, registering both hostility and affection in a fetishistic relationship. But while Price's objects are mobile, they are never, like Giacometti's *Disagreeable Objects*, mute. In all of her works, the text that appears onscreen seems to be the voice of the objects themselves,

addressing us directly. Beyond their shiny appearance, these creatures have their rhetorical devices down pat, appropriating the language of advertising, avant-garde manifesto and critical theory to further pull us into the deep end.

The words themselves revel in their own stylistic excess. In *West Hinder*, Price uses the sinking of a container ship carrying luxury cars across the English Channel in 2002 as the basis for her juxtaposition of sexualised, anthropomorphic turns of phrase and images of the submerged cars swirling and floating. The texts and images combine to form a kind of sci-fi fantasy in which the cars develop consciousness, memory and desire, and demonstrate their elegance and prowess at synchronised swimming. *Choir* (2012) also revels in wordplay, both in terms of the dual meaning of the title as the area of a church or an ensemble of singers, and in the formal qualities of obscure or unusual words, in this case a glossary of terms drawn from essays on ecclesiastical architecture in the first section of the film.

Price's interest in specialist terminology is apparent in all three works in *Here*. The use of precise language – words developed and chosen for their sound, their emotional impact and the ideology they encapsulate – variously blends and clashes with the images it accompanies or overwrites. The words and music used in each video are bold, bombastic and witty, and avoid an illustrative, didactic or po-faced essay on 'things'. The use of A-ha's *Take on Me* (1985) in *User Group Disco*, for example, somehow underscores the absurdity of the branding of some of the objects, but also emphasises the pleasure, sensuality and abandonment we might feel in the glossy surface of things – this is, after all, a disco. The pulsating, spinning closeups of kitsch ornaments, utensils and artefacts in the video often render these objects abstract, almost exploded, and the images seem to morph with a soundtrack which mimics the visual rhythm. The effect, similarly, alternates between pathos and bathos, the elevated and commonplace.

Beyond the works themselves, the entire arrangement of the exhibition seems orchestrated to force us into a reenactment of the complex, fraught engagement we have with the material world. The mere act of walking into the first of the three interconnected rooms, for example, elicits a heady, heightened sense of drama and occasion that veers between alarm and excitement. Even in this initial, physical approach to the screen, visitors are ushered into the kind of disorientating blackness that makes the heart beat faster and slows movement. Inching forward towards seating you cannot see, concerned about who or what you might stumble over, your approach is anxious, self-conscious and utterly immersive. It's a good strategy. There's no opportunity here to wander at will or disengage. The audience is captive.

SUSANNAH THOMPSON